

Message Text

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PAGE 01 AMMAN 02572 150822Z

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SUBJECT: TALK WITH PRIME MINISTER RIFAI-- GOVERNMENTAL CHANGE IN
JORDAN

SUMMARY: RIFAI TELLS ME HE HAS TRIED TO RESIGN THREE
TIMES SINCE HIS RETURN FROM THE U.S. THE KING REFUSES
TO ACCEPT ON THE BASIS THAT NO REPLACEMENT IS AVAILABLE
AND RIFAI ESSENTIAL IN CURRENT TIME OF CRISIS AND TENSION.
RIFAI HOPES TO TRY AGAIN IN MID-JUNE AFTER KING'S VISIT
TO SOVIET UNION. OUR JUDGMENT IS KING NOT LIKELY TO
MOVE QUICKLY TO REPLACE RIFAI. HE WILL MAXIMIZE
POLITICAL BENEFITS OF RIFAI'S DEPARTURE,
AND HE WILL BE FINAL ARBITER OF CHOICE OF RIFAI'S
REPLACEMENT WHICH MIGHT BE ONE OF THE CURRENT ANTI-
RIFAI GROUP AS EASILY AS SOMEONE RIFAI HIMSELF MIGHT
PUSH INTO POSITION. RIFAI HOPES TO UNDERTAKE SEMI-
RETIREMENT, REBUILD HIS CURRENTLY AILING HEALTH
(ULCERS, HIATAL HERNIA, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND POSSIBLE
BAD HEART CONDITION) AND TO LEAD A NEW GOVERNMENT FOR
THE KING AT A LATER DATE. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE COURSE OF A CONVERSATION MAY 12 WITH RIFAI
I ASKED HIM ABOUT STORIES CURRENTLY CIRCULATING IN
AMMAN OF HIS ATTEMPTS TO RESIGN. HE REFERRED TO A
DISCUSSION WE HAD SOME TIME AGO IN WHICH HE TOLD ME
HE HOPED TO RESIGN FOLLOWING KING'S RETURN FROM THE
UNITED STATES.

SECRET

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PAGE 02 AMMAN 02572 150822Z

2. RIFAI SAID THAT SINCE HE HAS COME BACK FROM THE U.S. TRIP HE HAS TRIED TO RESIGN THREE TIMES. THE FIRST TWO WERE ORAL RESIGNATIONS GIVEN TO THE KING WHICH KING REFUSED OUTRIGHT. THE THIRD, RIFAI SAID, WAS IN A LETTER WHICH THE KING TORE UP IN FRONT OF HIM. RIFAI SAID THE KING INSISTS THERE IS NO PROPER REPLACEMENT AVAILABLE AND THAT RIFAI WILL HAVE TO STAY ON. RIFAI TOLD ME THAT HE PLANS TO STAY FOR AWHILE, BUT THAT HE WILL SEE WHETHER HE CAN RESIGN AGAIN AND MAKE IT STICK WHEN KING COMES BACK FROM HIS TRIP TO MOSCOW IN MID-JUNE.

3. COMMENT: WHILE TOWN IS FULL OF CONFLICTING RUMORS. WHAT WE HAVE HEARD FROM GOOD SOURCES JIBES CLOSELY WITH WHAT RIFAI TOLD ME. IT ALSO FITS IN WITH WHAT RIFAI SAID SOME TIME AGO THAT HE MIGHT BE GOING TO DO. OUR JUDGMENT FROM HERE IS THAT KING WILL NOT LET RIFAI GO DURING CURRENT PERIOD OF POTENTIAL CRISIS AND TENSION OVER HAWK ARRANGEMENTS, DURING MOVES TO OBTAIN AIR DEFENSE FROM SOVIET UNION AND AT TIME OF POTENTIAL SHIFTS IN ARAB WORLD ALIGNMENTS. THERE IS OF COURSE NO CUSSESSOR READY AT HAND. ONE OF RIFAI'S PROPOSALS WOULD BE TO BRING CHIEF OF ROYAL COURT MUDHAR BADRAN TO PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE AND BRING BACK FROM NEW YORK JORDAN'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE SHARIF ABDUL HAMIN SHARAF TO RUN THE PALACE. THE PALACE TEAM WOULD TAKE ON ENHANCED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS AS IT HAD IN THE DAYS WHEN RIFAI WAS RUNNING THE COURT AND BEFORE HE BECAME PRIME MINISTER. RIFAI BASED HIS OWN FADE OUT ON HIS AILING HEALTH, HIS GROWING FATIGUE IN THE JOB, AND WHAT HE CALLED A CONVICTION THAT AFTER THE LONGEST PRIME MINISTERHSIP IN JORDANIAN HISTORY A NEW FACE ON THE SCENE IS REQUIRED. DEPARTMENT IS ALSO AWARE THAT RIFAI IS UNDER HEAVY AND GROWING CRITICISM FROM THE PUBLIC AND FROM A NUMBER OF HIS TRADITIONAL ENEMIES. HE IS THUS LIKELY TO SEE SOME REAL ADVANTAGES IN OPTING OUT HIMSELF.

4. IN OUR JUDGMENT, KING WILL LET HIM GO WHEN HE
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 AMMAN 02572 150822Z

FINDS MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE IN RIFAI'S EXIT. RIFAI OF COURSE WOULD LIKE TO SURVIVE AND BE PRIME MINISTER ANOTHER TIME. HE THUS PLANS FOR HIMSELF A BACK-GROUND ADVISORY ROLE TAKING ON SPECIAL PROJECTS FOR THE KING FROM TIME TO TIME WHILE HE GETS SET FOR A NEW PERIOD IN THE PRIME MINISTERIAL CHAIR.

5. ON PAST FORM, RIFAI'S CHOICE FOR THE NEW PRIME

MINISTER AS WELL AS HIS PREFERRED METHOD OF REARRANGING
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS ARE NOT NECESSARILY LIKELY TO
BE THOSE OF THE KING. KING COULD WELL CHOOSE FROM
A WIDER RANGE OF PERSONALITIES INCLUDING SOME STRONG
ANTI-RIFAI EAST BANKERS -- ONE OF RIFAI'S ARCH ENEMIES
UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT DR. ABD AS-SALAM AL-MAJALI IS A
PAST AND AT THE MOMENT CURRENT CONTENDER
FOR RIFAI'S CHAIR IF AND WHEN KING MAKES IT VACANT.
RIFAI INSISTS THAT HE AND KING
ARE BOTH PERSUADED THAT NEW PRIME MINISTER SHOULD
COME FROM GENERATION OF LEADERS ABOUT THE KING'S
AGE, RATHER THAN DIPPING INTO THE PILE OF OLDER
ELDER STATESMEN. HOWEVER, KING IN THE PAST HAS
BEEN INCLINED TO BREAK GOVERNMENTAL DEADLOCKS BY
PULLING IN ELDER STATESMEN TO FORM CARETAKER GOVERNMENTS
WHILE HE MANEUVERS A NEW CREW INTO POSITION BEHIND
THE SCENES. IN SUM, IT LOOKS LIKE NO GOVERNMENTAL
CHANGE FOR AWHILE AND THEN ONLY AFTER THE KING
DECIDES A CHANGE IS REQUIRED, AND POSSIBLY ONLY
AFTER HE HAS FASTENED ON THE BEST FIGURE TO TAKE
OVER FROM RIFAI.
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